

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, OAK LANE BRANCH
6614 North 12th Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6760
PA-6760

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, OAK LANE BRANCH

HABS No. PA-6760

Location: 6614 North 12th Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner: City of Philadelphia

Present Occupant: Free Library of Philadelphia

Present Use: branch library

Significance: Oak Lane was one of twenty-five branch libraries constructed between 1904 and 1930 by the Free Library of Philadelphia using a \$1.5 million grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Andrew Carnegie's public library construction grants were a major impetus for the growth of these institutions throughout the country. Philadelphia was second only to New York City in the size of its Carnegie grant and number of branch libraries constructed. Each jurisdiction receiving Carnegie library funds was responsible for providing a site and operating expenses equal to ten percent of the cost of construction. Prior to receiving the Carnegie funds in 1903, branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia (founded 1891) were housed in a variety of preexisting structures. The Carnegie library construction campaign provided twenty-five purpose-built branch libraries for the City of Philadelphia, each designed within the current ideal of efficient operation and using fashionable, but conservative, architectural forms and motifs.

Oak Lane was the twelfth Carnegie branch library opened by the Free Library of Philadelphia. Plans for the structure were approved by the Free Library Board of Trustees Carnegie Fund Committee on January 21, 1910 and the branch opened to the public on December 7, 1911. The Oak Lane Branch was designed by Philadelphia architect Ralph E. White.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Date of erection: 1910-1911, opening ceremony December 7, 1911
2. Architect: Ralph E. White
3. Original and subsequent owners/uses: Free Library of Philadelphia branch library, 1911 to present.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:¹
General contract – A. Whitehead, \$38,500
Heating – John P. Smith, \$2,800
Electrical - Walter C. McIntire & Co, \$1,064
5. Original plans and construction: Ralph E. White's plans for the Oak Lane branch were approved by the Free Library Carnegie Fund Committee on January 21, 1910 and construction proceeded during 1910-11. Architectural drawings have not been located.
6. Alterations and additions: The library retains its original appearance on the exterior, except for a brick-faced concrete block addition built on the south façade at the junction of the T-shaped plan. This modern addition contains an elevator and stairway. The interior spaces are largely intact but with changes in shelving, lighting and other fixtures. The Free Library had a major initiative in 1958-1962 to modernize its branch libraries, including Oak Lane which received new floor coverings, new fixtures, and fluorescent lighting.² More recently new light fixtures and floor coverings have been installed.

B. Historical Context:

In the nineteenth century most libraries in the United States were private or available only to subscribers. Starting in the late nineteenth century, many cities began to found "free library" systems with the goal of providing educational material and services to a wider array of citizens, particularly the burgeoning immigrant population. The Free Library of Philadelphia was founded in 1891 and proceeded to establish a central library and a network of neighborhood branches. Despite ambitious goals, however, these libraries remained rather modest affairs housed in rented space and utilizing mainly donated collections and volunteer staffing.

During this same period the library construction philanthropy of wealthy industrialist Andrew Carnegie would have a profound effect on both the development of professional library standards and the evolution of the building type. The Free Library of Philadelphia received a \$1.5 million grant in January 1903 from Andrew Carnegie and

¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (3 March 1910). Revised figures reflecting the changes to the Oak Lane entrance in April were not available.

² Photograph of Oak Lane Branch interior, 1966, Free Library of Philadelphia Central Branch, Director's Vault Collection.

the Carnegie Corporation to build thirty branch libraries.³ Carnegie had been engaged in library building philanthropy since 1886, but the program was expanded to jurisdictions outside of his personal and business sphere only in 1898. Carnegie library historian George Bobinski calls this later period the “wholesale phase” of Carnegie’s library philanthropy. From 1898 to 1919, he gave over \$39 million to 1,406 communities. The unprecedented scale of this effort contrasts with the “retail phase” between 1886 and 1898 when Carnegie donated \$1.8 million to six communities.⁴ The \$1.5 million gift to Philadelphia’s fledgling free library system was quite generous. Only New York City, which received a \$5.2 million grant for sixty-six libraries in 1899, built more branches using Carnegie funds. The next largest grants went to Baltimore and Cleveland; each city built fourteen libraries.⁵

In Philadelphia there was a delay while the various government agencies worked out a mechanism to legally accept and administer such unprecedented largesse. According to Bobinski, “the Pennsylvania State legislature had to approve an act authorizing the Philadelphia city council to enter into contracts with the trustees of the public library so that the arrangements necessary for receiving the Carnegie gift could be carried into effect.”⁶ After a year of bureaucratic maneuvering, the state legislature finally passed the law enabling the city to officially accept the gift. The final step before the Free Library could proceed was an ordinance approving this arrangement passed by Mayor John Weaver in January 1904. John Thomson quickly sent a letter to James Bertram, Carnegie’s personal secretary and gatekeeper for the library philanthropy program, expressing his relief that the Free Library could move forward with branch construction:

I have the pleasure of informing you that I have this morning received from the Clerk of Councils official notice that the Mayor has signed the Ordinance accepting Mr. Carnegie’s splendid gift to the City of Philadelphia. The matter has been one of great anxiety. . . . Arrangements are on foot to accept 4 or 5 sites and it is hoped that the preliminary arrangements for locating the system of Branch Libraries, made possible by Mr. Carnegie’s munificence, will be put in active motion at once. . . . I think we shall be able very rapidly to show our appreciation of what Mr. Carnegie has put it in our power to do.⁷

³ While the original grant stipulated funding for 30 libraries at \$50,000 each, rising construction costs caused the number to be scaled back in 1918. For the remaining branches, the Carnegie fund provided only part of the construction cost with the city or neighborhood groups making up the difference. See letter from Librarian John Ashhurst to James Bertram, Secretary, Carnegie Corporation officially changing the total number of Carnegie branches to “25 or 26,” (11 October 1918), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁴ George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 13-14.

⁵ Bobinski 229, 231.

⁶ Bobinski 44.

⁷ Letter, John Thomson to James Bertram (13 January 1904), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

The year-long delay in officially accepting the gift gave the Free Library time to quietly prepare to construct new branch buildings and move rapidly once approval came. Carnegie did not specify architectural designs or review plans at this time, but he did express a strong preference that the branch libraries include lecture rooms.⁸ In a letter officially accepting Carnegie's gift, Free Library Board of Trustees President Joseph G. Rosengarten noted that the Trustees "concur[red] fully" with his lecture room suggestion and planned to expand the already successful Free Library lecture program.⁹

Beyond a general desire for new branch buildings and an interest in including lecture rooms, it is not clear what guidelines or models informed the Free Library as they developed a fairly consistent branch library plan for their city. When Philadelphia received its Carnegie grant in 1903 there was no official design review by Carnegie or his staff. By 1908 Carnegie's secretary James Bertram had to approve the building plans for all new grants. The Carnegie publication "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings" [sic.] was first issued in 1911 by Bertram.¹⁰ Bertram was largely motivated by a distaste for what he viewed as wasteful features or extravagant designs that went over budget. He advocated prioritizing the needs of librarians over the opinions of architects. While the Philadelphia branch library plans progressed independent of Carnegie design oversight, it appears both were developing simultaneously and in harmony with the latest precepts in library planning for open stack branch libraries. The HABS survey of the Carnegie branches in Philadelphia showed that Oak Lane Branch is fully realized example of the T-shaped, open plan library form as developed by the Free Library. The Oak Lane Branch also illustrates how the demands of the local community could influence library design.

The Board of Trustees of the Free Library formed a Carnegie Fund Committee in March 1904 to oversee the details of this ambitious branch building effort. In response to a request from the Carnegie Fund Committee for instructions on how to select architects, the Board of Trustees implemented an ad hoc system. They sought to avoid the expense and complication of holding competitions so instead proposed to appoint an architect as branch sites were chosen. Selection seems to have been based on reputation and personal contacts, with some architects asking to be considered as work on the branches proceeded. The written record is thin on this point, but it seems apparent librarian John Thomson and assistant librarian John Ashhurst were instrumental in this process. John Thomson served as secretary of the Carnegie Fund Committee and the Free Library's leading staff member on all matters. Ashhurst's assistant librarian position was specifically created by the Board of Trustees "in order to undertake part of the very heavy

⁸ "Carnegie Offers \$1,500,000 to City," *Philadelphia Times*, 7 January 1903, clipping in Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁹ Letter, J. G. Rosengarten to Andrew Carnegie, (5 March 1904), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

¹⁰ Abigail Van Slyck. *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 35-36.

extra work that would now be involved in carrying out the Andrew Carnegie Branch Library Building scheme.”¹¹

In the interest of moving quickly to open new branch buildings, projects on donated or city-owned property typically were launched first. Later branches would be built on a mix of donated and purchased sites to ensure even distribution across the city. It was a site donation and the influence of well-connected residents that inspired selection of the Oak Lane Branch for the twelfth Carnegie-funded library. The citizens of the Oak Lane neighborhood, located east of Broad Street in the northern part of the city, took an active interest in the construction of their Free Library branch. In December 1907 the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that John Thomson had met with a local group regarding a possible Oak Lane Branch: “Through the efforts of the Review Club, an organization composed of prominent society women of Oak Lane, it is practically assured that this portion of Philadelphia is to have a Carnegie branch public library, the most desirable plot in view being at Twelfth Street and Oak Lane, near the Old York Road.”¹² The women needed to raise money to buy the site through public subscription. By late 1908 the Library Association of Oak Lane had arranged to purchase the corner lot at Twelfth Street and Oak Lane on behalf of the Free Library for a new Carnegie branch building.¹³ The transaction was completed in December 1909 when the site was transferred to the City from Charles W. Asbury for a “nominal fee.” The cost of the 130 by 148 foot lot was \$7,500.¹⁴

Ralph E. White (1886-1948) was appointed architect of the Oak Lane Branch on October 5, 1909. White was first mentioned as a potential branch library architect in December 1905, when his name was added to the Carnegie Fund Committee list at the suggestion of Mayor John Weaver.¹⁵ White received his Certificate in Building Construction from Drexel Institute in 1901, and he also took night courses at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Arts. He apprenticed with E. F. Durang and started his own firm around 1903. Relatively young compared to many of the other branch library designers, White had designed mainly residential and commercial additions, as well as several houses, a church, a bank, and a school before receiving the library contract. It is likely that the personal recommendation of Mayor Weaver was a major factor in his selection. Oak Lane was his only library design; a few years later White began to specialize somewhat in recreational structures for country clubs as well as government clients.¹⁶

At the time White was appointed to design Oak Lane, the Carnegie Fund Committee gave preliminary approval to general plans for the library and requested more

¹¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, (12 February 1904).

¹² “Oak Lane May Have Carnegie Library,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 December 1907, 5.

¹³ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (13 November 1908).

¹⁴ “Transfer Library Site,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 1909, 11.

¹⁵ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (15 December 1905).

¹⁶ “Ralph E. White,” in Roger Moss and Sandra Tatman, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930*. (New York: G.K. Hall & Company, 1984), 851-852; See also listing for “Ralph E. White” in www.philadelphiabuildings.org

detailed ones. The Committee also allocated \$60,000 from the Carnegie fund for Oak Lane.¹⁷ About a month later the Carnegie Fund Committee minutes mention that the Oak Lane plans were being reviewed by the librarians and they were preparing to invite bids.¹⁸ The Carnegie Fund Committee used a fairly consistent procedure for choosing contractors. The architect was asked to prepare the specifications and provide input on a list of invited bidders. As the branch construction project proceeded, the names of certain construction firms reappear several times as invited bidders. The plans were approved in January 1910; in early March the construction bids were awarded. A. Whitehead received the general contract for \$38,500. John P. Smith received the \$2,800 heating contract and Walter C. McIntire & Co. received the electrical contract for \$1,064.¹⁹

The construction of Oak Lane Branch was delayed when local residents protested the placement of the new library facing Twelfth Street rather than Oak Lane. In April 1910 the Carnegie Fund Committee took the unusual step of scheduling a meeting with White, Thomson, the local selectman, and “a considerable number of ladies of the district.” Although the contracts and permits had already been issued, Oak Lane residents had bombarded the Committee with petitions, letters and questions regarding placing the entrance diagonally at the corner of Oak Lane and Twelfth, particularly because of the school across the street.²⁰ An account of the meeting in the Carnegie Fund Committee minutes describes the architect explaining the various decisions that resulted in the current plan using a scale model of the proposed library and site. The invited “gentlemen” (interestingly, not the ladies) present expressed their opinions on the matter. After the guests left the meeting, the Committee concluded that the library would have to remain oriented toward Twelfth Street, due to the fact that contracts had already been awarded, the configuration of the site, and the probable difficulty of acquiring adjoining land on Twelfth Street. What was left unstated in the written record is the likelihood that the basic T-shaped branch library now familiar to the Carnegie Fund Committee was a goal that they deemed nonnegotiable. Thomson was instructed to inform Messrs. Asbury, Cummings, and Campbell, the trustees for the site purchase, that the library’s main entrance would face Twelfth Street.²¹

Apparently some additional compromise was necessary because the minutes of the May 6th meeting indicate that White proposed alterations to the planned lecture room entrance on Oak Lane. After discussing and examining the model, the Committee approved his recommendation to make that entrance more elaborate and prominent. Thomson was to inform the Oak Lane trustees of this decision while White was to redo the construction contract to reflect this change.²² This compromise clearly explains the

¹⁷ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (5 October 1909).

¹⁸ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (12 November 1909).

¹⁹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (21 January 1910); (3 March 1910). The construction permits were issued on March 21, 1910. See “New Library at Oak Lane,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 March 1910, 9.

²⁰ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (15 April 1910);

²¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (22 April 1910).

²² Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (6 May 1910).

unusual angled placement and elaborate decoration of this branch's Oak Lane lecture room entrance pavilion.

Word of the donor complaints must have reached the Carnegie Corporation office in New York City. A letter from Thomson to James Bertram explained that the Library Association of Oak Lane had donated a valuable site for the branch and assured him that they recently passed a resolution of support for the project. Thomson included the text of the resolution which read:

Resolved: That the Oak Lane Library Association on behalf of the citizens of Oak Lane, extend to Mr. Andrew Carnegie an expression of their sincere gratitude and appreciation of his munificent gift to the community.

Resolved: That the Oak Lane Library Association extend a cordial vote of thanks to the gentlemen composing the Carnegie Library Commission, for their extreme liberality in the appropriation of funds for the erection of a Library structure in Oak Lane, and, for their careful and considerate judgment in the selection of appropriate plans and location for the library building.²³

It was probably a relief to Thomson to be able to report that this matter had been resolved, particular since the Free Library continued to hope that Carnegie would provide additional funding for a central library.

The cornerstone ceremony for Oak Lane Branch took place on August 10, 1910. By the spring of 1911, John Thomson reported that the building was nearly complete and would hopefully open that fall.²⁴ The official opening ceremony for Oak Lane took place on December 7, 1911. An article in *Library Journal* described the ceremony, during which over 400 attendees heard speeches by members of the Free Library Board of Trustees, the architect, the present of the Ladies' Review Club, and the president of the Oak Lane Library Association. According to the article the new Oak Lane library "consists of one story and a basement." It continued:

The main reading room, measuring 72 by 34 feet, and the children's room, measuring 49 by 34 feet, are erected in an unbroken whole. . . . In the basement is a classroom measuring 34 by 30 feet, which will be used by societies of a literary or educational character. Arrangements are made by which the children's room can be shut off by sliding doors, and makes a lecture room capable of seating two hundred and fifty persons.²⁵

²³ Letter, Librarian John Thomson to James Bertram, Secretary, Carnegie Corporation, (16 May 1910), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

²⁴ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Fifteenth Annual Report* (1910), 15. The report of the Librarian included in this volume was dated April 1911.

²⁵ "Twelfth Branch Library in Philadelphia," *The Library Journal* 37, no. 1 (January 1912): 24.

Again it is the open, flexible plan and accommodations for lectures and children that characterized the new Carnegie branch buildings. The brief article also pointed to the progress of the Free Library system in moving forward with additional branches and the plans for a new main library on Ben Franklin Parkway after designs by Horace Trumbauer.

The neighborhood responded enthusiastically to the new branch; circulation immediately doubled compared to the temporary library and 182 new readers were registered in the first month.²⁶ The Ladies Review Club and other community groups also began meeting at the new library and enthusiastically supporting it. The William Rau photographs of Oak Lane Branch published in the 1911 Free Library *Annual Report* show the symmetrical brick and terra cotta library on its corner lot in a suburban-looking neighborhood. The edge of the property is lined by a low hedge. A substantial house and part of the Ellwood School are also visible in this image. For the interior view, the large and open library space is occupied by a pair of female librarians at the central desk, and several female patrons are posed reading at the tables. The side lecture room entrance is shown as well as pocket doors for closing the large cased opening between the two sections. Low shelves and desks divide the large spaces into more intimate areas while taller bookshelves line the outer walls under the windows. The final cost for this structure was \$57,325.44.²⁷

Oak Lane represents a typical example of the open plan, T-shaped library that became common for the Carnegie-funded Free Library branches. The Philadelphia approach shares a number of features with Carnegie Libraries nationwide. In 1917 author Theodore Wesley Koch pointed out that a large room undivided by partitions became a defining feature of Carnegie branches across the country, as was providing a space for lectures. He notes that the lecture program was particularly successful in Philadelphia, where “each branch has a recognized clientele and lecturers are always sure of a good sized audience.”²⁸ In her study of the Carnegie Library, architectural historian Abigail Van Slyck discusses the contemporaneous struggle within the library profession over conflicting philosophies of restricting access to reading material and newer ideals of community involvement.²⁹ Van Slyck also discusses the importance of children’s rooms and specialized outreach to young readers as a new characteristic of libraries in this period.³⁰ Oak Lane and other Philadelphia libraries demonstrate a progressive commitment to open stack branches and encouraging young patrons, but also a desire to control this public space. Here opposing impulses were balanced by stationing the main librarians’ desk in front of the entrance where patrons could be observed by the staff.

²⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (5 January 1912), 13.

²⁷ Photograph of Oak Lane with cost figures on reverse in Director’s Vault, Central Branch, Free Library of Philadelphia.

²⁸ Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries*, (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917), 86.

²⁹ Abigail Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 122.

³⁰ See Van Slyck, “Chapter 6 – Reading: The Experience of Children as Library Users.”

This arrangement was used in all of the Free Library Carnegie branches and continues today.

In the decades since its construction the Oak Lane Branch has continued to serve neighborhood library patrons with few substantial changes in form. Interior appointments such as the charging desk, shelving and patron tables have been changed over the years, as well as the floor covering and lighting. The Free Library had a major initiative in 1958-1962 to modernize its branch libraries. Oak Lane's rehabilitation was completed in 1958 and, in addition to changes in flooring, lighting, and furniture, included removing the pocket doors and surrounding molding from the large opening between wings. Adding Internet service and computer facilities was the focus of 1999 series of upgrades at the Free Library branches called the "Changing Lives" campaign.³¹

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Oak Lane Branch library is an early-twentieth-century Beaux Arts structure with a symmetrical form, a formal axial entrance at the center of the front façade, and Neoclassical decorative details. The library stands one-story high on a raised basement. It is essentially T-shaped in plan with a main block facing Twelfth Street and a rectangular ell extending from the center of the rear façade. An additional entrance pavilion is placed at a forty-five degree angle on the façade facing Oak Lane at the junction of main block and ell.

2. Condition of fabric: Good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The front, or main block, of this T-plan building is five bays wide and three bays deep. The main library room inside is 72 by 34 feet. The rear ell is three bays wide and three bays deep. Originally intended to house a children's reading room/lecture room, this space is 34 by 49 feet.

2. Foundation: Oak Lane Branch sits on an approximately four foot high brick foundation; the foundation is higher for the rear ell because of the gently sloping topography of the site. The transition from foundation to the walls is demarcated by a wide white terra cotta water table constructed of three horizontal courses of block, the center one in the form of a congé molding.

³¹ Photograph of Oak Lane Branch interior, 1966, Free Library of Philadelphia Central Branch, Director's Vault Collection; History of Oak Lane Branch on the Free Library website at <http://libwww.freelibrary.org/branches/history.cfm?loc=OAK>

3. Walls: The walls are red brick laid in a modified Flemish bond with pairs of stretchers. The vertical mortar joints are hidden every other stretcher, creating the appearance of long Roman bricks. At the base of the wall above the water table and at the window sill level there are belt courses of sets of three stretcher and three soldier bricks creating a repeating square pattern. There is a course of soldier bricks at the top of the wall below the terra cotta cornice. A contrasting white terra cotta spandrel panel is located below each window. The rectangular spandrel is framed by a projecting course of header bricks. Eight of the headers – the four corners and two each on the top and bottom – are glazed with white terra cotta. Inside each panel is circle within a square framed by three recessed horizontal lines on either side. The red brick facing of the elevator addition and the detailing attempt to match the historic structure, although the spandrel panels are omitted and the cornice simplified. On the Oak Lane side façade of the main block, the center spandrel panel was removed and a World War I bronze memorial plaque was installed during the 1920s.

4. Structural system, framing: Oak Lane Branch library has load bearing brick masonry walls and foundation. The large trusses used to support the roof and span the open reading room spaces are hidden by the curved plaster ceiling. There are additional metal support columns in the basement meeting room.

5. Main entrance pavilion: The main entrance on Twelfth Street is indicated by a monumental Neoclassical entry pavilion executed in white terra cotta and marble to contrast with the red brick walls. The pavilion is topped by parapet and entablature with mutules in the soffit that have guttae ornament on the bottom edge. Bronze letters on the parapet read “THE FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA.” The pavilion steps back at the sides and includes dramatic concave curves at the corners. The deeper joints between the large terra cotta blocks on the sides create a more rusticated appearance. On the front the joints are thin and smooth. Above the large opening is a raised rectangle in the terra cotta with bronze letters reading “OAK LANE BRANCH” attached. The sign is flanked by stylized torches also executed in white terra cotta. Below the sign is a shallow recess with a stylized triglyph and metope design in white terra cotta. Below is the wide marble surround for the monumental opening. The surround has small raised circles at the two upper corners and two set of notches. As the three part molding gets gradually higher from the outer edge, there is a large ovolo molding on both corners. There is a shallow open vestibule before the doorway with the walls and ceiling sheathed in white terra cotta with a pattern of recessed rectangular panels, raised squares, and a stylized Greek key motif. The vestibule floor and plinth for the door are white marble. This pavilion is accessed via a flight of three concrete steps, a wide landing, and a flight of eight marble steps all flanked by marble knee walls. The metal hand railings are more recent additions, as are the cast iron urn planters.

Oak Lane entrance pavilion: The side entrance on Oak Lane is also set within a monumental white terra cotta and marble Neoclassical entrance pavilion that is nearly as large as the main one. The pavilion is set into the junction of the main block and ell at an unusual forty-five-degree angle. The prominence of this entrance was the result of a compromise with local residents who preferred to have the library face Oak Lane. The

pavilion is topped by parapet and entablature. The cornice has large mutules in the soffit with guttae ornament on the bottom edge. Bronze letters affixed to the parapet read "THE FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA." The pavilion is notched at the corners and has deep horizontal joints between the large terra cotta blocks for rusticated appearance. Another set of bronze letters reading "OAK LANE BRANCH" appears in the frieze. Unlike other Carnegie branch libraries in Philadelphia this side entrance is not specifically labeled "Lecture Room." The opening has a wide marble surround that is more ornate than the one on the main entrance, with a stylized console keystone featuring guttae across the width of the opening. It also has cube like corner blocks with a circle motif on the visible faces and a stylized bracket below that suggests a triglyph with three guttae on the bottom edge. There is a shallow open vestibule before the doorway with the walls and ceiling sheathed in white terra cotta with a pattern of recessed rectangular panels, raised squares, and a stylized Greek key motif. The large coffer in the ceiling is outlined with dentils. The vestibule floor and plinth for the door are white marble. This pavilion is accessed via a flight of ten marble steps flanked by wide marble knee walls with a curved top. The metal hand railings are more recent additions.

6. Chimney: N/A

7. Openings

a. Doorways and Doors: The main doorway is located inside the main entrance pavilion described above. It has a pair of red painted wood doors with glazing on the top half and a square panel on the bottom. The panel is framed with ogee molding and contains a low relief circle set within a slightly larger circle nearly hiding a square below. The yellow painted wood surround includes Doric pilasters on either side with raised panels. The modified entablature above has a row of dentils, a frieze with a vertical rectangle motif (the shape and size is similar to soldier bricks), and stylized triglyphs at the corners. Above the door is a fixed transom with fourteen square lights. The original solid wood security doors are still extant; these pocket doors slide into the wall when open.

The side doorway on Oak Lane is located inside the entrance pavilion described above. It has a pair of modern metal doors that replaced the original wood ones. The doorway has a yellow painted wood surround which has similar ornament but is slightly narrower than the main entrance doorway. It includes half Doric pilasters on both side and a modified entablature above with a row of dentils and a frieze with a vertical rectangle motif (the shape and size is similar to soldier bricks). Above the door is a fixed transom with twelve square lights and covered with a metal security screen.

There is another utilitarian doorway with a single metal door into the basement level of the elevator addition on the north side of the rear ell. This doorway is accessed via a concrete ramp sloping down from the north.

b. Windows: Each rectangular window opening on the main floor of the library is filled with a pair of tall, six over six wood sash windows separated by a wide mullion. Each set of windows is in a plain wood frame set into the brick wall with queen closers at the edges. A brick splayed jack arch is above each opening with a terra cotta keystone at the

center. The wide sill is also white terra cotta and includes a cove molding at the bottom. The basement level windows on the ell and the south side of the main wing are single four over four wood sash windows set into the brick wall with a simple wood frame. Each window has a brick splayed jack arch above and a simple white terra cotta sill. The modern windows in the elevator addition have the same shape and similar details. All of the windows have metal security grilles on the exterior.

8. Roof: Oak Lane Branch has a flat or low pitched roof surrounded by a brick parapet with white terra cotta coping. The parapet has a decorative brick pattern of sets of three stretcher or soldier bricks. Below the parapet is a wide entablature executed in white terra cotta that also functions as a boxed eave with a copper gutter along the top. Below the cornice are thick mutules with decorative guttae on the bottom front edge. A wide frieze below that is unornamented except for shallow raised rectangles above each window opening keystone. The elevator addition has a white cornice to match the entablature on the historic structure, but with simpler lines and detailing.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Oak Lane branch library has a mainly T-shaped plan with a main block, rear ell, and projecting front entry pavilion. A large side entrance on Oak Lane is placed at an angle to the rest of the building. The main library spaces have high ceilings and minimal interior partitions. Through the main entrance pavilion there is a wood vestibule inside the main reading room. Originally low shelves served to demarcate different departments within the library (children's, reference) while still allowing personnel at the central desk to see the entire space. Some private work spaces have been created by walls approximately seven feet high in the north side of the main room. The original circulation pattern of patrons entering through the vestibule and walking around the central charging desk to enter and exit is still in use although the original desk, rails, gates and other fixtures have been replaced.

Oak Lane Branch has a partial basement with most of the usable spaces located under the ell. The rooms on this level include staff kitchen, lunchroom, bathrooms, offices, boiler room, and meeting rooms, and other storage.

2. Stairway: The original stairway for Oak Lane Branch is no longer extant. The current stairway between the main floor and basement is a modern closed stair in the elevator addition on the south façade. The side entrance pavilion on the north does not have any evidence of a stairway.

3. Flooring: The original hardwood floors are no longer visible or have been replaced, except inside the interior vestibule. The current flooring in the rest of the main floor is commercial grade carpet. The flooring in the basement is square linoleum or vinyl tiles.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceiling are plaster painted in shades of yellow. There is a thick cornice at the top of the walls with several layers of molding, including a row of dentils. The ceilings on the main floor are shallow barrel vaults divided into large

squares by thick plaster moldings. The original skylights have been removed on the interior and the space is now filled by smooth plaster. Several round decorative metal ventilation grilles are located in the middle of squares around the ceiling. These historic grilles feature an eight-pointed star design over a grid and are decorated with shells and filigree. They are set within a circular molding. The basement rooms have plain yellow plaster ceilings and walls, with high baseboards also painted pale yellow. There is a similar decorative plaster cornice with dentils inside the Oak Lane entrance vestibule on the north side of the ell.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

Main entrance: There is a wood interior vestibule projecting from the main doorway that reaches to the ceiling cornice. It has a flat top and is in the form of a Classical entablature with pilasters flanking the door. The ornamentation is geometric and simple, with incised circles and squares above the door and raised rectangles and a circle in the parapet above the thick cornice. The double doors are wood with glazing in the top half.

The large rectangular opening between the main room and ell is now unornamented. Historic photographs show that this opening was originally cased with a heavy Classical entablature and included pocket doors.³²

The side doorways in the ell leading to the stairway and to the Oak Lane exterior door have thick reveals cased with recessed panels and heavy molding. The overdoors have a Classical cornice with ovolo molding. The one on the north leading to the Oak Lane entrance has a pair of solid wood doors with horizontal recessed panels. The south doorway to the stairway and elevator does not have doors and the casing is plainer. Inside the elevator addition the modern metal doors are surrounded with plain metal frames. Inside the Oak Lane entrance vestibule, the modern replacement doors are within the original wood frame that resembles the main entrance vestibule. Here the tall opening is framed by flat wide molding with mitred corners and a raised section around the outer edge. The panel above the door has the same incised circles and squares ornament as the main entrance.

The interior basement doorways for the kitchen and staff room have original doors and moldings. Staff room door is solid wood with one large vertical recessed panel lined with molding and a simple brass knob. The swinging hinge door to the kitchen is similar, with the original dark brown varnish and an opening at the top glazed with etched obscure glass. The molding is plain and flat with mitred corners and covered with the original dark brown varnish.

b. Windows: The windows are set directly into the plaster over brick wall with only a projecting sill with decorative molding below. In the basement the window treatment is similar, but the sill is much deeper.

³² Interior photograph published in Free Library of Philadelphia *Annual Report*, 1911.

6. Decorative features and trim: Simple wood book shelves line the outer walls below the windows and are either original or similar. This arrangement was typical for the Philadelphia branch libraries and allowed maximum use of wall space for shelves while still allowing for considerable natural light.

The original built in full-height cabinets including wood counters and drawers are located in the basement staff room and kitchen. These cabinets retain their original hardware and dark brown varnish finish.

7. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: It is likely that the original boiler system has been replaced. Vents are located along the outer walls below each window at the top of the book shelves and covered by simple metal grilles. Additional metal ventilation grilles are located in the ceiling.

b. Lighting: Historic photographs indicate that a series of six metal chandeliers with round globes hung from the main room ceiling.³³ These electric chandeliers had eight sets of upward and downward fixtures arranged around an open hoop with s-curve arms and round glass globes. In addition, sconces with one upward and one downward round globe were mounted along the top edge of the outer wall book shelves. The original fixtures were replaced with modern fluorescent ones during the late 1950s renovation. A more recent renovation saw removal of the fluorescent fixtures and replacement with incandescent open top pendant lights that bear no resemblance to the originals. The basement has ceiling fixtures with long fluorescent tubes throughout. A pair of cast iron light standards originally flanking the exterior entrance is no longer extant.

c. Plumbing: The library would have been built with basic bathroom and kitchen facilities, which have now been upgraded.

d. Dumbwaiter: There is a dumbwaiter between the basement and main floor for books that appears to be original.

D. Site: The library's status as a public institution is communicated by its elevated site placement on a corner lot. The immediate neighborhood is still primarily residential, with the exception of the school across Oak Lane. The site slopes down to the west, exposing more of the foundation on the rear and side elevations.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: Drawings have not been located for this structure.

B. Early Views: William Rau photographs (one exterior and one interior) in the Free Library *Annual Report* for 1911.

³³ Interior photograph published in Free Library of Philadelphia *Annual Report*, 1911.

C. Bibliography

The records of the Free Library of Philadelphia are located at the Central Library on Vine Street. The *Annual Reports* are located in the Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154; and the Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Books are located in the Director's Vault (access by special permission).

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PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Oak Lane Branch Library was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief, during summer 2007 as part of a larger initiative to record the Carnegie funded branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The project is sponsored by HABS in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, John A. Gallery, director; and the Free Library of Philadelphia, William J. Fleming, Administrative Services Director, and made possible through a Congressional appropriation for recording in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The historical reports were prepared by Lisa P. Davidson and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large-format photography was undertaken for HABS by Joseph Elliott.